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COLLEAGUE PASTOR

OF THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN FEDERAL-STREET, BOSTON,

JUNE 30, 1824.

BY WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING,

PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED AT THE CHRISTIAN REGISTER OFFICE.

Thomas G. Wells, printer.

1824.

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JNO. W. DAVIS,
Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

SERMON.

MATT. x. 16.—BEHOLD, I SEND YOU FORTH AS SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES: BE YE THEREFORE WISE AS SERPENTS AND HARMLESS AS DOVES.

THE communication of moral and religious truth is the most important office committed to men. The Son of God came into the world not to legislate for nations, not to command armies, not to sit on the throne of universal monarchy; but to teach religion, to establish the empire of truth and holiness in the souls of men. The highest end of human nature is duty, virtue, piety, excellence, moral greatness, spiritual glory; and he, who effectually labours for these, is taking part with God, in God's noblest work. The christian ministry, then, which has for its end men's spiritual improvement and salvation, and which is intrusted for this end with weapons of heavenly temper and power, deserves to be ranked amongst God's most beneficent institutions and men's most honourable labours. The occasion requires that this institution should be our principal topick.

How happy a change has taken place since the words of Christ in the text were spoken! Ministers are no longer sent forth into the midst of wolves. Through the labours, sufferings, and triumphs of apostles, martyrs, and good and great men in successive ages, Christianity has become the professed and

honoured religion of the most civilized nations, and its preachers are exposed to very different temptations from those of savage persecution. Still our text has an application to the present time. We see our Saviour commanding his apostles, to regard in their ministry the circumstances of the age in which they lived. Surrounded with foes, they were to exercise the wisdom or prudence, of which the serpent was in ancient times the emblem, and to join with it the innocence and mildness of the dove. And in like manner, the christian minister is at all periods to regard the signs, the distinctive marks and character of the age to which he belongs, and must accommodate his ministry to its wants and demands. Accordingly, I propose to consider some of the leading traits of the present age, and the influence which they should have on a christian teacher.

I. The state of the world, compared with the past, may be called *enlightened,* and requires an enlightened ministry. It hardly seems necessary to prove, that religion should be dispensed by men, who at least keep pace with the intellect of the age in which they live. Some passages of Scripture however have been wrested to prove, that an unlearned ministry is that which God particularly honours. He always chooses, we are told, "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." But texts of this description are misunderstood, through the very ignorance which they are adduced to support. The wise, who are spoken of contemptuously in the New Testament, were not really enlightened men, but pretenders to wisdom,

who substituted dreams of imagination and wild hypotheses for sober inquiry into God's works, and who knew comparatively nothing of nature or the human mind. The present age has a quite different illumination from that, in which ancient philosophy prided itself. It is marked by great and obvious improvements in the methods of reasoning and inquiry, and by the consequent discovery and diffusion of a great mass of physical and moral truth, wholly unknown in the time of Christ. Now we affirm, that such an age demands an enlightened ministry. We want teachers, who will be able to discern and unfold the consistency of revealed religion with the new lights which are breaking in from nature; and who will be able to draw, from all men's discoveries in the outward world, and in their own souls, illustrations, analogies, and arguments for Christianity. We have reason to believe, that God, the author of nature and revelation, has established a harmony between them, and that their beams are intended to mingle and shed a joint radiance; and consequently, other things being equal, that teacher is best fitted to dispense Christianity, whose compass of mind enables him to compare what God is teaching in his works and in his word, and to present the truths of religion with those modifications and restraints which other acknowledged truths require. Christianity now needs dispensers, who will make history, nature, and the improvements of society, tributary to its elucidation and support; who will show its adaptation to man as an ever progressive being; who will be able to meet the objections to its truth, which will naturally be started in an

active, stirring, enquiring age; and though last not least, who will have enough of mental and moral courage to detect and renounce the errors in the Church, on which such objections are generally built. In such an age a ministry is wanted, which will furnish discussions of religious topicks, not inferior at least in intelligence to those, which people are accustomed to read and hear on other subjects. Christianity will suffer, if at a time, when vigour and acuteness of thinking are carried into all other departments, the pulpit should send forth nothing but wild declamation, positive assertion, or dull common places, with which even childhood is satiated. Religion must be seen to be the friend and quickener of intellect. It must be exhibited with clearness of reasoning and variety of illustration; nor ought it to be deprived of the benefits of a pure and felicitous diction and of rich and glowing imagery, where these gifts fall to the lot of the teacher. It is not meant that every minister must be a man of genius; for genius is one of God's rarest inspirations; and of all the beamings and breathings of genius, perhaps the rarest is eloquence. I mean only to say, that the age demands of those, who devote themselves to the administration of Christianity, that they should feel themselves called upon for the highest cultivation and fullest developement of the intellectual nature. Instead of thinking, that the ministry is a refuge for dulness, and that whoever can escape from the plough is fit for God's spiritual husbandry, we ought to feel that no profession demands more enlarged thinking and more various acquisitions of truth.

In proportion as society becomes enlightened, *talent* acquires influence. In rude ages bodily strength is the most honorable distinction, and in subsequent times military prowess and skill confer mastery and eminence. But as society advances, mind, thought, becomes the sovereign of the world; and accordingly, at the present moment, profound and glowing thought, though breathing only from the silent page, exerts a kind of omnipotent and omnipresent energy. It crosses oceans and spreads through nations; and at one and the same moment, the conceptions of a single mind are electrifying and kindling multitudes, through wider regions than the Roman Eagle overshadowed. This agency of mind on mind, I repeat it, is the true sovereignty of the world, and kings and heroes are becoming impotent by the side of men of deep and fervent thought. In such a state of things, Religion would wage a very unequal war, if divorced from talent and cultivated intellect, if committed to weak and untaught minds. God plainly intends, that it should be advanced by human agency; and does he not then intend, to summon to its aid the mightiest and noblest power with which man is gifted?

Let it not be said, that Christianity has an intrinsick glory, a native beauty, which no art or talent of man can heighten; that Christianity is one and the same, by whatever lips it is communicated; and that it needs nothing but the most naked exposition of its truths, to accomplish its saving purposes. Who does not know, that all truth takes a hue and form from the soul through which it passes, that in every mind it is invested with peculiar associations, and that conse-

quently the same truth is quite a different thing, when exhibited by men of different habits of thought and feeling? Who does not know, that the sublimest doctrines lose in some hands all their grandeur, and the loveliest all their attractiveness? Who does not know, how much the diffusion and power of any system, whether physical, moral, or political, depend on the order according to which it is arranged, on the broad and consistent views which are given of it, on the connections which it is shown to hold with other truths, on the analogies by which it is illustrated, adorned, and enforced, and though last not least, on the clearness and energy of the style in which it is conveyed? "Nothing is needed in religion," some say, "but the naked truth." But I apprehend, that there is no such thing as naked truth, at least as far as moral subjects are concerned. Truth which relates to God, and duty, and happiness, and a future state, is always *humanized*, if I may so use the word, by passing through a human mind; and when communicated powerfully, it will always be found to come to us in drapery, thrown round it by the imagination, reason, and moral feelings of the teacher. It comes to us warm and living with the impressions and affections, which it has produced in the soul from which it issues; and it ought so to come; for the highest evidence of moral truth is found in the moral principles and feelings of our nature, and therefore it fails of its best support, unless it is seen to accord with and to act upon these. The evidence of Christianity, which operates most universally, is not history nor miracles, but its correspondence to the highest capacities, deepest wants, and purest

aspirations of our nature, to the cravings of an immortal spirit; and when it comes to us from a mind, in which it has discovered nothing of this adaptation, and has touched none of these springs, it wants one of its chief signatures of divinity. Christianity is not then to be exhibited nakedly. It owes much of its power to the mind, which communicates it; and the greater the enlargement and developement of the mind of which it has possessed itself, and from which it flows, the wider and deeper will be its action on the soul.

It may be said without censoriousness, that the ordinary mode, in which Christianity has been exhibited in past times, does not suit the illumination of the present. That mode has been too narrow, technical, pedantick. Religion has been made a separate business, and a dull, unsocial, melancholy business too, instead of being manifested as a truth, which bears on and touches every thing human, as a universal spirit, which ought to breathe through and modify all our desires and pursuits, all our trains of thought and emotion. And this narrow, forbidding mode of exhibiting Christianity is easily explained by its early history. Monks shut up in cells; a priesthood cut off by celibacy from the sympathies and most interesting relations of life; and universities enslaved to a scholastick logick, and taught to place wisdom in verbal subtleties and unintelligible definitions; these took Christianity into their keeping; and at their chilling touch this generous religion so full of life and affection, became a dry, frigid, abstract system. Christianity, as it came from their hands, and has been transmitted by a majority of protestant divines, reminds us of the human form, compressed by swathing bands, until every joint

is rigid, every movement constrained, and almost all the beauty and grace of nature obliterated. Instead of regarding it as a heavenly institution, designed to perfect our *whole* nature, to offer awakening and purifying objects to the intellect, imagination, and heart, to develop every capacity of devout and social feeling, to form a rich, various, generous virtue, divines have cramped and tortured the gospel into various systems, composed in the main of theological riddles and contradictions; and this religion of love has been made to inculcate a monkish and dark-visaged piety, very hostile to the free expansion and full enjoyment of all our faculties and social affections. Great improvements indeed in this particular are taking place among Christians of almost every denomination. Religion has been brought from the cell of the monk, and the school of the verbal disputant, into life and society; and its connections with all our pursuits and feelings have been made manifest. Still, Christianity, I apprehend, is not viewed in sufficiently broad lights to meet the spirit of an age, which is tracing connections between all objects of thought and branches of knowledge, and which cannot but distrust an alleged revelation, in as far as it is seen to want harmonies and affinities with other parts of God's system, and especially with human nature and human life.

II. The age in which we live demands not only an enlightened but an *earnest* ministry, for it is an age of earnestness and excitement. Men feel and think at present with more energy than formerly. There is more of interest and fervour. We learn now from experience what might have been inferred from the

purposes of our Creator, that Civilization and refinement are not, as has been sometimes thought, inconsistent with sensibility; that the intellect may grow without exhausting or overshadowing the heart. The human mind was never more in earnest than at the present moment. The political revolutions, which form such broad features and distinctions of our age, have sprung from a new and deep working in the human soul. Men have caught glimpses, however indistinct, of the worth, dignity, rights, and great interests of their nature; and a thirst for untried good, and impatience of long endured wrongs, have broken out wildly, like the fires of Etna, and shaken and convulsed the earth. It is impossible not to discern this increased fervour of mind in every department of life. A new spirit of improvement is abroad. The imagination can no longer be confined to the acquisitions of past ages, but is kindling the passions by vague but noble ideas of blessings never yet attained. Multitudes, unwilling to wait the slow pace of that great innovator, time, are taking the work of reform into their own hands. Accordingly the reverence for antiquity and for age-hallowed establishments, and the passion for change and amelioration, are now arrayed against each other in open hostility, and all great questions, affecting human happiness, are debated with the eagerness of party. The character of the age is stamped very strongly on its literary productions. Who, that can compare the present with the past, is not struck with the bold and earnest spirit of the literature of our times. It refuses to waste itself on trifles, or to minister to mere gratification. Almost all that is written has now a bearing on great

interests of human nature. Fiction is no longer a mere amusement; but transcendant genius, accommodating itself to the imaginative and excitable character of the age, has seized upon this province of literature, and turned fiction from a toy into a mighty engine, and, under the light tale, is breathing through the community either its reverence for the old or its thirst for the new, communicates the spirit and lessons of history, unfolds the operations of religious and civil institutions, and defends or assails new theories of education or morals by exhibiting them in life and action. The poetry of the age is equally characteristick. It has a deeper and more impressive tone than comes to us from what has been called the Augustan age of English literature. The regular, elaborate, harmonious strains which delighted a former generation, are now accused, I say not how justly, of playing too much on the surface of nature and of the heart. Men want and demand a more thrilling note, a poetry which pierces beneath the exterior of life to the depths of the soul. and which lays open its mysterious workings, borrowing from the whole outward creation fresh images and correspondences, with which to illuminate the secrets of the world within us. So keen is this appetite, that extravagancies of imagination, and gross violations both of taste and moral sentiment, are forgiven, when conjoined with what awakens strong emotion; and unhappily the most stirring is the most popular poetry, even though it issue from the desolate soul of a misanthrope and a libertine, and exhale poison and death.

Now, religion ought to be dispensed in accommodation to this spirit and character of our age. Men

desire excitement, and religion must be communicated in a more exciting form. It must be seen not only to correspond and to be adapted to the intellect, but to furnish nutriment and appeals to the highest and profoundest sentiments of our nature. It must not be exhibited in the dry, pedantick divisions of a scholastick theology; nor must it be set forth and tricked out in the light drapery of an artificial rhetorick, in prettinesses of style, in measured sentences, with an insipid floridness, and in the form of elegantly feeble essays. No; it must come from the soul in the language of earnest conviction and strong feeling. Men will not now be trifled with. They listen impatiently to great subjects treated with apathy. They want a religion which will take a strong hold upon them; and no system, I am sure, can now maintain its ground, which wants the power of awakening real and deep interest in the soul. It is objected to Unitarian Christianity that it does not possess this heart-stirring energy, and if so it will, and still more, it ought to fall; for it does not suit the spirit of our times, nor the essential and abiding spirit of human nature. Men will prefer even a fanaticism which is in earnest, to a pretended rationality, which leaves untouched all the great springs of the soul, which never lays a quickening hand on our love and veneration, our awe and fear, our hope and joy.

It is obvious, I think, that the spirit of the age, which demands a more exciting administration of Christianity, begins to be understood and is responded to by preachers. Those of us, whose memory extends back but a little way, can see a revolution taking place in this country. "The repose of the

pulpit" has been disturbed. In England the established Church gives broad symptoms of awaking; and the slumbering incumbents of a state religion, either roused by sympathy, or aware of the necessity of self-defence, are beginning to exhibit the energy of the freer and more zealous sects around them.

In such an age earnestness should characterise the ministry; and by this I mean not a louder voice or a more vehement gesture; I mean no tricks of oratory; but a solemn conviction that religion is a great concern, and a solemn purpose that its claims shall be felt by others. To suit such an age, a minister must communicate religion, not only as a result of reasoning, but as a matter of experience, with that inexpressible character of reality, that life and power, which accompany truths drawn from a man's own soul. We ought to speak of religion as something which we ourselves know. Its influences, struggles, joys, sorrows, should be delineated from our own history. The life and sensibility which we would spread should be strong in our own breasts. This is the only genuine, unfailing spring of an earnest ministry. Men may work themselves for a time into a fervour by artificial means; but the flame is unsteady, "a crackling of thorns" on a cold hearth; and after all, it is hard for the most successful art to give even for a time that soul-subduing tone to the voice, that air of native feeling to the countenance, and that raciness and freshness to the conceptions, which come from an experimental sense of religious truth; and accordingly I would suggest, that the most important part of theological education, even in this enlightened age, is not the communication of knowledge, essential as that

is, but the conversion and exaltation of religious knowledge and belief into a living, practical, and soul-kindling conviction. Much as the age requires intellectual culture in a minister, it requires still more, that his acquisitions of truth should be instinct with life and feeling; that he should deliver his message not mechanically and "in the line of his profession," but with the sincerity and earnestness of a man bent on great effects; that he should speak of God, of Christ, of the dignity and loveliness of Christian virtue, of heaven and redemption, not as of traditions and historical records, about which he has only read, but as of realities which he understands and feels in the very depths of his soul.

III. The present is an age of *free and earnest enquiry on the subject of religion,* and consequently an age, in which the extremes of scepticism and bigotry, and a multiplicity of sects, and a diversity of interpretations of the sacred volume, must be expected; and these circumstances of the times influence and modify the duties of the ministry. Free enquiry cannot exist without generating a degree of scepticism; and against this influence, infinitely more blighting than any error of any sect, a minister is bound to erect every barrier. The human mind by a natural re-action is undoubtedly tending, after its long vassalage, to licentious speculation. Men have begun to send keen, searching glances, into old institutions, whether of religion, literature, or policy; and have detected so many abuses, that a suspicion of what is old has in many cases taken place of the veneration for antiquity. In such an age Christianity *must* be

subjected to a rigid scrutiny. Church establishments and state patronage cannot screen it from investigation; and its ministers, far from being called to remove it from the bar of reason, where God has chosen that it should appear, are only bound to see that its claims be fairly and fully made known; and to this they are solemnly bound; and consequently it is one of their first duties, to search deeply and understand thoroughly the true foundations and evidences, on which the religion stands. Now it seems to me, that just in proportion as the human mind makes progress, the *inward* evidences of Christianity, the marks of divinity which it wears on its own brow, are becoming more and more important. I refer to the evidences which are drawn from its excellence, purity, and happy influences; from its adaptation to the spiritual wants, to the weakness and the greatness of human nature; from the original and unborrowed character, the greatness of soul, and the celestial loveliness of its founder; from its unbounded benevolence, corresponding with the spirit of the universe; and from its views of God's parental character and purposes, of human duty and perfection, and of a future state; views manifestly tending to the exaltation and perpetual improvement of our nature, yet wholly opposed to the character of the age in which they were unfolded. The historical and miraculous proofs of Christianity are indeed essential and impregnable; but, without superseding these, the inward proofs, of which I speak, are becoming more and more necessary, and exert a greater power, in proportion as the moral discernment and sensibilities of men are strengthened and enlarged. And if this

be true, then Christianity is endangered, and scepticism fortified, by nothing so much as by representations of the religion, which sully its native lustre and darken its inward signatures of a heavenly origin; and accordingly the first and most solemn duty of its ministers is, to rescue it from such perversions; to see that it be not condemned for doctrines, for which it is in no respect responsible; and to vindicate its character as eminently a *rational religion*, that is, a religion consistent with itself, with the great principles of human nature, with God's acknowledged attributes, and with those indestructible convictions, which spring almost instinctively from our moral constitution, and which grow stronger and stronger as the human mind is developed. A professed revelation, carrying contradiction on its front, and wounding those sentiments of justice and goodness, which are the highest tests of moral truth, cannot stand; and those, who thus exhibit Christianity, however pure their aim, are shaking its foundations more deeply than its open and inveterate foes.

But free enquiry not only generates occasional scepticism, but much more a diversity of opinion among the believers of Christianity; and to this the ministry must have a special adaptation. In such an age the ministry must in a measure be controversial. In particular, a minister, who after serious investigation attaches himself to that class of Christians, to which we of this religious society are known to belong, cannot but feel that the painful office of conflict with other denominations is laid upon him; for, whilst we deny the christian name to none who acknowledge Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, we do

deliberately believe, that by many who confess him his religion is mournfully disfigured. We believe, that piety at present is robbed in no small degree of its singleness, energy, and happiness, by the multiplication in the church of objects of supreme worship; by the division of the one God into three persons, who sustain different relations to mankind; and above all by the dishonourable views formed of the moral character and administration of the Deity. Errors relating to God seem to us among the most pernicious that can grow up among christians; for they darken, and, in the strong language of Scripture, "turn into blood," the Sun of the Spiritual Universe. Around just views of the Divine character all truths and all virtues naturally gather; and although some minds of native irrepressible vigour may rise to greatness, in spite of dishonourable conceptions of God, yet, as a general rule, human nature cannot spread to its just and full proportions under their appalling, enslaving, heart-withering control. We discover very plainly, as we think, in the frequent torpor of the conscience and heart in regard to religious obligation, the melancholy influences of that system, so prevalent among us, which robs our Heavenly Father of his parental attributes. Indeed it seems impossible for the conscience, under such injurious representations of the Divine character, to discharge intelligently its solemn office of enforcing love to God as man's highest duty; and accordingly when religious excitements take place under this gloomy system, they bear the marks of a morbid action, much more than of a healthy, restorative process of the moral nature.

These errours a minister of liberal views of Christianity will feel himself bound to withstand. But let me not be understood, as if I would have the ministry given chiefly to controversy, and would turn the pulpit into a battery for the perpetual assault of adverse sects. Oh no. Other strains than those of warfare should predominate in this sacred place. A minister may be faithful to truth, without brandishing perpetually the weapons of controversy. Occasional discussions of disputed doctrines are indeed demanded by the zeal, with which errour is maintained. But it becomes the preacher to remember, that there is a silent, indirect influence, more sure and powerful than direct assault on false opinions. The most effectual method of expelling errour is, not to meet it sword in hand, but gradually to instill great truths, with which it cannot easily co-exist, and by which the mind outgrows it. Men, who have been recovered from false systems, will generally tell you, that the first step of their deliverance was the admission of some principle, which seemed not to menace their past opinions, but which prepared the mind for the entrance of another and another truth, until they were brought, almost without suspecting it, to look on almost every doctrine of religion with other eyes, and in another and more generous light. The old superstitions about ghosts and dreams were not expelled by argument, for hardly a book was written against them ; but men gradually outgrew them ; and the spectres, which had haunted the terror-stricken soul for ages, fled before an improved philosophy, just as they were supposed to vanish before the rising sun. And in the same manner, the errours which disfigure Christianity, and

from which no creed is free, are to yield to the growth of the human mind. Instead of spending his strength in tracking and refuting errour, let the minister, who would serve the cause of truth, labour to gain and diffuse more and more enlarged and lofty views of our religion, of its nature, spirit, and end. Let him labour, to separate what is of universal and everlasting application from the local and the temporary; to penetrate beneath the letter to the spirit; to detach the primary, essential, and all-comprehending principles of Christianity from the incrustations, accidental associations, and subordinate appendages by which they are often obscured; and to fix and establish these in men's minds as the standard by which more partial views are to be tried. Let him especially set forth the *great moral purpose* of Christianity, always teaching, that Christ came to deliver from the *power* still more than from the punishment of sin; that his most important operation is *within* us; and that the highest end of his mission, is the erection of God's throne in the soul, the inspiration of a fervent filial piety, a piety founded in confiding views of God's parental character, and manifested in a charity corresponding to God's unbounded and ever active love. In addition to these efforts, let him strive to communicate the just principles of interpreting the Scriptures, that men, reading them more intelligently may read them with new interest, and he will have discharged his chief duty in relation to controversy.

It is an interesting thought, that, through the influences now described, a sensible progress is taking place in men's conception of Christianity. It is a plain matter of fact, that the hard features of that religious

system, which has been "received by tradition from our fathers," are greatly softened; and that a necessity is felt by those who hold it, of accommodating their representations of it more and more to the improved philosophy of the human mind and to the undeniable principles of natural and revealed religion. Unconditional Election is seldom heard of among us. The Imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity is hastening to join the exploded doctrine of Transubstantiation. The more revolting representations of man's state by nature are judiciously kept out of sight; and what is of still greater importance, preaching is incomparably more practical than formerly. And all these changes are owing, not to theological controversy, so much as to the general progress of the human mind. This progress is especially discernable in the diminished importance now ascribed to the outward parts of Christianity. Christians, having grown up to understand that their religion is a spirit and not a form, are beginning to feel the puerility as well as guilt of breaking Christ's followers into factions, on such questions as these, How much a Bishop differs from a Presbyter? and, How great a quantity of water should be used in baptism? And whilst they desire to ascertain the truth in these particulars, they look back on the uncharitable heat, with which these and similar topics were once discussed, with something of the wonder which they feel, on recollecting the violence of the papists during the memorable debate, Whether the Virgin Mary were born with original sin? It is a consoling and delightful thought, that God, who uses Christianity to advance civilization and knowledge, makes use of this very advancement to bring back

Christianity to a purer state, thus binding together and carrying forward by mutual action the cause of knowledge and the cause of religion, and strengthening perpetually their blended and blessed influences on human nature.

IV. The age is in many respects a *corrupt* one, and needs and demands in the ministry a spirit of reform. The age, I say, is corrupt; not because I consider it as falling below the purity of past times, but because it is obviously and grossly defective, when measured by the Christian standard and by the lights and advantages which it enjoys. I know nothing to justify the cry of modern degeneracy, but rather incline to the belief, that here at least the sense of religion was never stronger than at present. In comparing different periods as to virtue and piety, regard must be had to difference of circumstances. It would argue little wisdom or candour, to expect the same freedom from luxury and dissipation in this opulent and flourishing community, as marked the first settlement of our country, when the inhabitants, scarcely sheltered from the elements, and almost wholly cut off from intercourse with the civilized world, could command little more than the necessaries of life; and yet it is through superficial comparisons in such particulars, that the past is often magnified at the expense of the present. I mean not to strike a balance between this age and former ones. I look on this age in the light of Christianity, as a minister ought to look upon it; and I see much to make a good man mourn, and to stir up Christ's servants to prayer and toil. That our increased comforts, improved arts, and overflowing

prosperity, are often abused to licentiousness; that Christianity is with multitudes a mere name and form; that a practical Atheism, which ascribes to nature and fortune the gifts and operations of God, and a practical Infidelity, which lives and cares and provides only for the present state, abound on every side of us; that much, which is called morality, springs from a prudent balancing of the passions and a discreet regard to worldly interests; that there is an insensibility to God, which, if our own hearts were not infected by it, would shock and amaze us; that education, instead of guarding and rearing the moral and religious nature as its supreme care, often betrays and sacrifices it to accomplishments and acquisitions which apply only to the present life; that there is a mournful prevalence of dissoluteness among the young and of intemperance among the poor; that the very religion of peace is made a torch of discord; and that the fires of uncharitableness and bigotry, fires kindled from hell, often burn on altars consecrated to the true God;—that such evils exist, who does not know? What christian can look round him and say, that the state of society corresponds to what men may and should be, under the light of the gospel, and in an age of advanced intelligence? As for that man, who, on surveying the world, thinks its condition almost as healthy as can be desired or hoped; who sees but a few superficial blots on the general aspect of society; who thinks the ministry established for no higher end, than to perpetuate the present state of morals and religion; whose heart is never burdened and sorrow-smitten by the fearful doom, to which multitudes around him are thoughtlessly hastening; Oh let not

that man take on him the care of souls. The physician, who should enter a hospital, to congratulate his dying patients on their pleasant sensations and rapid convalescence, would be as faithful to his trust, as the minister, who sees no deep moral maladies around him. No man is fitted to withstand great evils with energy, unless he be impressed by their greatness. No man is fitted to enter upon that warfare with moral evil, to which the ministry is set apart, who is not pained and pierced by its extent and woes; who does not burn to witness and advance a great moral revolution in the world.

Am I told, that "romantick expectations of great changes in society will do more harm than good; that the world will move along in its present course, let the ministry do what it may; that we must take the present state as God has made it, and not waste our strength in useless lamentation for incurable evils." I hold this language, though it takes the name of philosophy, to be wholly unwarranted by experience and revelation. If there be one striking feature in human nature, it is its susceptibleness of improvement; and who is authorized to say, that the limit of Christian improvement is reached? that whilst science and art, intellect and imagination, are extending their domains, the conscience and affections, the moral and religious principles of our nature, are incapable of increased power and elevation? Have we not pledges, in man's admiration of disinterested, heroick love; in his power of conceiving and thirsting for unattained heights of excellence; and in the splendour and sublimity of virtue already manifested in not a few who "shine as lights" in the darknes of past ages, that man was

created for perpetual moral and religious progress. True, the minister should not yield himself to romantic anticipations; for disappointment may deject him. Let him not expect to break in a moment chains of habit, which years have riveted, or to bring back to immediate intimacy with God souls which have wandered long and far from him. This is romance; but there is something to be dreaded by the minister more than this; I mean that frigid tameness of mind, too common in christian teachers, which confounds the actual and the possible; which cannot burst the shackles of custom; which never kindles at the thought of great improvements of human nature; which is satisfied if religion receive an outward respect, and never dreams of enthroning it in men's souls; which looks on the strong holds of sin with despair; which utters by rote the solemn and magnificent language of the gospel without expecting it to "work mightily;" which sees in the ministry a part of the mechanism of society, a useful guardian of publick order, but never suspects the powers with which it is armed by Christianity.

The ministry is indeed armed with great powers for great effects. The doctrines, which Christianity commits to its teachers, are mighty engines. The perfect character of God; the tender and solemn attributes, which belong to him as our Father and judge; his purposes of infinite and everlasting mercy towards the human race; the character and history of Christ; his entire, self-immolating devotion to the cause of mankind; his intimate union with his followers; his sufferings, and cross, his resurrection, ascension, and intercession; the promised aids of the Holy Spirit; the immortality of man; the retributions of the future state; the felicities and glories of heaven,

and the punishments of hell; here are truths, able to move the whole soul and to war victoriously with its host of passions. The teacher, to whom are committed the infinite realities of the spiritual world, the sanctions of eternity, "the powers of the life to come," has instruments to work with, which turn to feebleness all other means of influence. There is not heard on earth a voice so powerful, so penetrating, as that of an enlightened minister, who, under the absorbing influence of these mighty truths, devotes himself a living sacrifice, a whole burnt offering, to the cause of enlightening and saving his fellow-creatures.

No; there is no romance in a minister's proposing, and hoping to forward, a great moral revolution on the earth; for the religion, which he is appointed to preach, was intended and is adapted to work deeply and widely, and to change the face of society. Christianity was not ushered into the world with such a stupendous preparation; it was not foreshown through so many ages by enraptured prophets; it was not proclaimed so joyfully by the songs of angels; it was not preached by such holy lips and sealed by such precious blood, to be only a pageant, a form, a sound, a show. Oh no. It has come from heaven, with heaven's life and power,—come to "make all things new," to make "the wilderness glad and the desert blossom as the rose," to break the stony heart, to set free the guilt-burdened and earth-bound spirit, and to "present it faultless before God's glory with exceeding joy." With courage and hope becoming such a religion, let the minister bring to his work his concentrated powers of intellect and affection, and God, in whose cause he labours, will accompany and crown the labour with an almighty blessing.

I hasten to the usual addresses on this occasion. To the pastor elect :

You are now, my brother, to be set apart to the christian ministry. I bid you welcome to its duties, and implore for you strength to discharge them, a long and prosperous course, increasing success, and everlasting rewards. I also welcome you to the connexion which is this day formed between you and myself. I thank God for an associate, in whose virtues and endowments I have the promise of personal comfort and relief, and, still more, the pledges of usefulness to this people. I have lived too long, to expect unmingled good in this or in any relation of life; nor am I ignorant of the difficulties and trials, which are thought to attend the union of different minds and different hands in the care of the same church. God grant us that singleness of purpose, that sincere concern for the salvation of our hearers, which will make the success of each the happiness of both. I know, for I have borne, the anxieties and sufferings which belong to the first years of the christian ministry, and I beg you to avail yourself of whatever aid my experience can give you. But no human aid can lift every burden from your mind; nor would the truest kindness desire for you exemption from the universal lot. May the discipline, which awaits you, give purity and loftiness to your motives; give energy and tenderness to your character, and prepare you to minister to the wants of a tempted and afflicted world with that sympathy and wisdom, which fellowship in suffering can alone bestow. May you grow in grace, and in the spirit of the ministry, as you grow in years; and when the voice which now speaks to you shall cease to be heard within these walls, may you, my brother, be left to enjoy and reward the confidence, to point out

the path and the perils, to fortify the virtues, to animate the piety, to comfort the sorrows, to save the souls of this much loved people.

Brethren of this Christian Society!

I rejoice in the proof, which this day affords, of your desire to secure the administration of Christ's word and ordinances to yourselves and your children; and I congratulate you on the prospects which it opens before you. The recollections, which rush upon my mind, of your sympathy and uninterrupted kindness through the vicissitudes of my health and the frequent suspensions of my labours, encourage me to anticipate for my young brother that kindness and candour, on which the happiness of a minister so much depends. I cannot ask for him sincerer attachment, than it has been my lot to enjoy. I remember, however, that the reciprocation of kind feelings is not the highest end of the ministry; and accordingly my most earnest desire and prayer to God is, that with a new pastor, he may send you new influences of his spirit, and that, through our joint labours, Christianity, being rooted in your understandings and hearts, may spring up into a rich harvest of universal goodness. May a more earnest concern for salvation, and a thirst for more generous improvements, be excited in your breasts. May a new life breathe through the worship of this house, and a new love join the hearts of the worshippers. May our ministry produce everlasting fruits; and on that great day, which will summon the teacher and the taught before the judgment of Christ, may *you*, my much loved and respected people, be "our joy and crown;" and may *we*, when all hearts shall be revealed, be seen to have sought your good with unfeigned and disinterested love!

NOTES.

NOTE 1.—*for page* 13.

I have spoken of the reproach thrown on Unitarian Christianity, as wanting power to awaken strong interest and zeal. This reproach may be traced to various causes. First, many Christians make great mistakes as to the nature of true earnestness and zeal, supposing it to consist in animal excitements and ungoverned movements of the passions, and thus exposing it to the suspicion, if not the contempt, of reflecting men. Strange, that Christians, with their Master's history in their hands, should fall into this errour; for who was ever more earnest, and at the same time, who was ever calmer, than Jesus? Virtuous zeal begins in deep and strong convictions of the understanding, and issues in a strong, effectual purpose of duty; and mere sensibility, when disjoined from these, so far from being a Christian grace, partakes of the nature of vice.

Another cause of the reproach referred to is, that *party spirit* has been singularly busy in misrepresenting Unitarianism. The history of the church abounds in the excesses of party feeling; and by a kind of necessity, this bad passion, in every age, seeks some channel through which to pour itself forth, some object against which to discharge its bitterness and virulence; and this object now is Unitarianism. It is doubtful, whether the controversy between the papists and protestants, bitter and unrelenting as it was, will afford instances of more flagrant misrepresentation, than the professors of this doctrine are called to encounter. Truth is most wantonly sported with. Notwithstanding the well known fact, that Unitarians have distinguished themselves by defending Christianity against infidels, they are charged with deism, and, still more, attempts are made to confound them with German writers, who not only reject Christianity, but question the existence of a God! It is comforting to reflect, that abuse is neutralized by excess, and that there is a natural sentiment of honour and justice in the human breast, which secures a reaction in favour of truth and rectitude, in proportion to the wrongs to which they have been exposed.

Another ground of the reproach referred to deserves particularly to be named. It is the habit of confounding Unitarianism with all the opinions which have been associated with it, and of making it responsible for all. The injustice of this would be

seen and resented, if a Trinitarian were charged with every opinion which has been at any time found in company with the doctrine of three persons in one God; and if every rash saying of every brother Trinitarian were to be laid at his door. But this is the common mode of treating Unitarians. If one of their number happens to send abroad crude and extravagant notions, he is at once made the oracle and mouth of the whole body; whilst the affecting, solemn, and impressive views of religion which form the mass of their writings are studiously kept out of sight.

By Unitarianism I understand the doctrine, that God is strictly One Person, One Conscious Agent, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is alone and exclusively the Supreme and Independent God, and that Jesus Christ is a distinct, inferior, and dependent being. This doctrine may plainly be held in connexion with a great diversity of opinions on other subjects, and I have known it joined even with the errours of Calvinism. Of course it may be expected to form sometimes part of a system, which, as a whole, is very uninteresting; but there would be manifest injustice in setting down Unitarianism, as on this account wanting in power to move the soul.

In England, at the present day, the great Unitarian principle seems to me to be held in connexions not very favourable to the excitement of a due fervour; and some of the causes are not obscure. The Unitarians of that country, through circumstances not necessary to be detailed, may be considered as forming a political as well as religious party. Now it is apparent, from the history of religion in England, particularly from the history of Puritanism and the Established Church, that religion always suffers by being confounded with political feelings and struggles. But, leaving this delicate topick, I haste to another still more delicate. The influence of *distinguished individuals*, so great on all classes of Christians, has not been favourable to a just zeal among Unitarians in England. Dr Priestley should always be named with respect for his eminent endowments, and for his devotion to science and to the cause of Christianity; but the distinctive traits of his mind made him too receptive of the spirit of his times, which was a spirit of innovation, as well as of improvement. Distinguished more by rapidity, than by profoundness of thought; inclined, perhaps by his attachment to physical science, to confound the provinces of matter and mind; constitutionally deficient in moral enthusiasm and deep feeling; and connected by political and literary sympathies with the revolutionists on the continent,

whose hearts were frozen by an earth-born philosophy, he was not particularly fitted to spread warmth and earnestness around him, or to exhibit Christianity in its most quickening form. He endeavoured to incorporate with Unitarianism the chilling doctrines of the Materialism of the Soul, of the mechanical Necessity of human actions, and of the suspension of consciousness for ages after death, and adopted *philosophical* notions, as they have been falsely called, in regard to prayer, divine influence, &c. I think too, that his literary connexions, his habits of physical research, and the spirit of the age led him to believe, that Christianity would be made more credible by excluding from it *the supernatural* as much as possible; an opinion which probably swayed not a little his views of his favourite doctrines, and which indeed is not uncommon among philosophers; though to me it seems not very rational; for reason rather teaches, that the supernatural cannot form an inconsiderable feature, but must occupy either a large space or none at all, in the divine administration. The result was, that he framed and propagated a system, in many respects open to the charge of being cold and uninteresting. But surely the great doctrine of "One God even the Father," or of the Supreme Divinity of the Father alone, is not to be identified with all the speculations of Dr Priestly or of any other theologian. To me it seems to attract to itself naturally and powerfully all those doctrines of Christianity, which are most suited to touch, move, exalt, and sanctify the soul; and however mixed at present with imperfect views, it will, I doubt not, through the affinity which subsists between all the truths of God's word, unite with itself more and more whatever of genuine Christianity is scattered through the various denominations of Christians.

Had I time, I might enlarge on one more cause of the reproach thrown on Unitarianism, of being a cold, uninteresting doctrine, and a cause which implies errour and blame in its professors. Unitarians, contending against *irrational* opinions, have been very anxious to maintain the character of rationality. Now in religion, as in common life, a distinction is often made between *reason* and the *imagination and affections*, as if they had separate provinces and must act apart; and the consequence is, that a system is apt to be thought rational, in proportion as it is addressed to the naked intellect, and neglects the other parts of our nature. This is a sad errour. From the nature and purposes of religion, that system of faith is alone rational, which accords

with man's whole nature, and especially with his moral nature, with those high spiritual faculties and sensibilities which adapt and direct the mind to God, and to a nobler existence than the present. Accordingly, it may be said of men, in whom the intellect acts alone, or in whom it is disjoined in a great degree from imagination, taste, and refined moral sentiment, from the perception and feeling of the great, the good, and the lovely, that, although they claim for themselves peculiarly the character of rational, they are among the last to discover the *rational in religion*. The subject is too copious to be pursued farther at present; but I could not abstain from this short notice of an errour which I think has done injury to a glorious cause.

NOTE II.—*for page 26.*

It was my intention, but I wanted time and strength, to consider an objection which may be made to my views of the power, which the Christian ministry is fitted to exert on society. I may be told that it has not hitherto put forth this power. I know that the history of the ministry furnishes many sad facts; but its alleged impotence is to be ascribed to no inherent defect, but to gross and palpable perversion; to its having lent itself for ages to the purposes of worldly ambition; to its having blunted the edge of its heavenly weapons, and unnerved its own arm, by fanaticism, superstition, and corruptions of the truth. And, after all, the ministry has never been wholly impotent; but on a broad view will be found to have contributed largely to human improvent. And when we consider that the obstructions to the efficacy of this institution are yielding to better views of religion; that in the progress of society, men are growing more and more susceptible of moral and religious influences; that in an age of experiment and rapid improvements, we are authorized to anticipate more effectual methods of training the young for dispensing Christianity; and, above all, that God's spirit is specially pledged to prosper wise and holy efforts for the promotion of his truth; is it not rational to believe, that the ministry is destined to become as powerful an agent in the regeneration of society as has been suggested in this discourse?